

“Viva, viva il Tricolore” Which Citizenship Education in Italian Schools?

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Abstract

The overall aim of this paper is to draw attention to a number of educational practices through which the 2012 Law “Rules for Acquiring Knowledge and Skills relating to «Citizenship and the Constitution» and for teaching the Italian national anthem (the Hymn of Mameli) in schools” is being implemented. In particular, this paper focuses on the description of the 2015/2016 school year-end party dedicated to the theme of citizenship education that involved 100 children aged 3 to 6 in a municipal nursery school in that part of the Po Valley bordering between Lombardy and Emilia Romagna.

The goal is to discuss how the notion of national belonging is proposed to new generations and hence how individual and collective imagination is shaped and how cultural identity and memory are reproduced. Also, it focuses on the question of whether the idea of nationhood as channeled through these educational micro-practices is a way of allowing an inclusive notion of nationhood to become established.

Keywords: Cultural reproduction; Citizenship; School year-end party; Agency; Inclusive nationhood

In recent years, alongside a robust debate on the limitations and potential of multiculturalism (Moddod 2007; Parekh 2000; Vertovec, Wessendorf 2010) and on the theme of belonging and transnational identities (Faist 2000; Levitt 2001; Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt 1999) there has been a growing interest in the re-nationalization processes which are present pretty much everywhere across Europe, including in response to the general crisis that started in 2008. In particular, socio-anthropological thinking has been focused on the neo-assimilationist turnaround in the integration policies of most European countries (Antonsich 2016; Brubaker 2001; Gringrich, Banks 2006; Joppke 2004, 2007, 2016) and on the theme of “inclusive nationhood”, i.e., on the establishment of an idea of nationhood that is capable of providing wellbeing and safety to all individuals, rather than produce

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separation and exclusion, “one that offers a sense of belonging and identity yet also accommodate difference” (Antonsich, Mavroudi and Miheli 2017, p. 157). As part of this, the relationship between multiculturalism and national identity is seen as being complementary, rather than opposed, to national identity,

multiculturalism as a form of integration receptive of diversity is then seen as a part of a process of nationhood-building that builds on cultural minority identities as well as national identities to create hyphenated identities (Rietveld 2014, p. 51).

Within this area of interest, this paper focuses in particular on educational processes to explore a number of practices through which the theme of “inclusive nationhood” is being developed in Italian schools following the approval of the law n.222/2012 “Rules for Acquiring Knowledge and Skills relating to «Citizenship and the Constitution» and for teaching the Italian national anthem (the Hymn of Mameli) in schools”.

The aim is to understand how the notion of nationhood is being proposed in performances and educational practices to new generations and hence how it shapes the individual and collective imagination of children and their families. This paper also examines how these practices fit into the context of the process of globalization that has been going on for several years now - in a multicultural context like that of Italian schools - which idea of “citizenship” they transmit, and whether they are an effective means of conveying the idea of a governing and inclusive nationhood. As Michael Skey writes when shifting attention to daily life

attention shifts from trying to theorise nations as “things” that exist in the world, to understanding the way in which manifold practices, symbols, texts, objects and utterances form part a wider social discourse that (re) produces the world as a word of nations (Skey 2011, p. 10).

After setting the context for the 2012 law, this paper describes a school year-end party dedicated to citizenship education in a northern Italy nursery school located in that part of the Po Valley bordering between Lombardy and Emilia Romagna; there follows a critical analysis aimed at highlighting contradictions and raising questions.

The Political Scene: The Construction of a New Historical Memory?

The 2012 law “Rules for Acquiring Knowledge and Skills relating to «Citizenship and the Constitution» and for the teaching the Italian national anthem (the Hymn of Mameli) in schools” requires that, starting from school

year 2012/2013, in all school types and grades, as part of acquiring knowledge on “Citizenship and the Constitution”, lessons be organized aimed at informing and stimulating thinking on the events and the meaning of the Risorgimento and national Unity, the national anthem (the Hymn of Mameli), the national flag and the Constitution. Amongst other initiatives, the national anthem will be taught alongside its “historical and ideal foundation”. The law also establishes that 17 March (the date on which Italy was proclaimed a single nation) will be the «Day of national Unity, of the Constitution, of the national anthem and of the flag» for the purpose of promoting the values of citizenship and strengthening national identity through remembrance and civic memory.

This law marks an important turnaround as part of a process that has been going on for several years and which aims to review and reconstruct the historical memory relating to national unity. Indeed, from the post-war period until the 1990s, the discourse on nationalism, the flag and love for the homeland have been, in Italy, the prerogative of right-wing political parties (Viroli 1995). After the Risorgimento, the notions of nationhood and homeland were a Fascist myth and were then inherited by right-wing parties. Whereas right-wing parties talked about nationhood, left-wing parties talked about internationalism. As a result, two opposite political identities (Fabietti 1995) have come into being. Both are based upon the social selection of remembrance (Fabietti, Matera 1999): on the one hand, the Movimento Sociale Italiano (Italian Social Movement), later renamed Alleanza Nazionale (National Alliance), with the triad “God, Homeland and Family”, the national anthem (the hymn of Mameli) and the Tricolor, and on the other the Partito Comunista Italiano (Italian communist party), later renamed Partito democratico di sinistra (left-wing democratic party) which appealed to an international set of values (Galli della Loggia 1998). Until the 1990s, those people who talked about Homeland, let alone Nation, displayed the Tricolor, sang the national anthem (the hymn of Mameli) and extolled the merits of the Risorgimento, were accused of fascism by the left-wing parties (Ostellino 2011). The general climate was one of “much politics and little State, much ideology and little culture of the State” (Galli della Loggia 1998, p. 143): the overwhelming centrality of political contraposition has, in fact, prevented the development of a national identity based upon the notion of democratic citizenship. The call to nationhood is almost always confused with an instrumental use of historical memory aimed to pursue contingent – often local – interests.

Since the 1990s, a series of events have entailed a change in the transmission of this memory disputed between right-wing and left-wing parties: the end of ideologies, the political ascent of the Lega Nord (the northern league) with its secessionist project, the European unification project, the strong migration flows and the economic crisis. These events have pushed

left-wing parties to reassess the values of national identity and patriotism and to make a tacit agreement with right-wing parties; Homeland, the Constitution and the Flag have become an instrument to strengthen a new sense of identity faced with a series of changes perceived as threats, by proposing a new memory, one that is no longer disputed but rather shared by right-wing and left-wing parties. It is possible to postulate that the opposition between right-wing and left-wing parties has evolved into a coalition between the two against the secessionist thrust of the League, but also as a reaction to the loss of identity associated with the migrant flows and the European unification process. The bill “Rules for Acquiring Knowledge and Skills relating to «Citizenship and the Constitution» and for the teaching the Italian national anthem (the Hymn of Mameli) in schools”, promulgated on 23rd November 2012 was jointly proposed by MPs Paola Frassinetti (Popolo della Libertà) and Maria Coscia (Partito Democratico) and is the outcome of this process.

The reasons for the concern that once again political considerations might prevail upon the desire for - and promotion of - a different and inclusive notion of nationhood and citizenship are connected to the practices through which this law is being implemented in many schools. This paper examines one of these practices, a school year-end party in a municipal nursery school in a city of northern Italy, where migrant children account for 50 per cent of all the children attending the school¹.

A School Year-End Party

Traditionally, in Italian nursery schools, the children perform for their parents and relatives during a year-end party. Despite the significant social and cultural changes in Italian society and schools over the last fifty years, the year-end party has remained unscathed, with the children reciting rhymes by heart or dancing and wearing bizarre costumes on more or less improvised stages in the school courtyard in front of their parents. In recent years, parents have been filming the children (or, to be more precise, “their own child”) with religious devotion, using their mobile phones and cameras, and therefore, in the eyes of an external beholder, the party is quite a bizarre ritual. While the children perform on stage scenes from bygone times, every

1 The author, as an observer and participant in the party, has chosen not to disclose the location and name of the municipal school that is the object of research so as to avoid sterile polemic and also because the overall aim of this paper is to use the analysis of this year-end party to stimulate critical thinking on the theme of citizenship education and children agency. The school at issue is a municipal school in the “Bassa Padana”, that part of the Po Valley bordering between Lombardy and Emilia Romagna. It is located in a neighborhood of the city center, historically attended by many children coming from Eastern Europe and North Africa (in some classes they account up to 70% of all children in that class).

parent films his/her “own child” with state-of-the-art technological equipment. The party thus appears to be not so much a collective event but rather a series of individual acts of “consumption” of one’s child, that happen to take place within a community, which, by the way, is mostly viewed as being a source of nuisance for the shooting (Biscaldi 2013).

The party analyzed here took place on a summer afternoon in the school courtyard (a rectangular inner courtyard a portion of which was enclosed for the performance). One side of the courtyard was covered with a huge Tricolor.

The space reserved for the children and teachers and that reserved for the spectators (the children’s families) were clearly enclosed and communication between the children and their families was strictly forbidden and punished by the staff. The space reserved for the children was in the portion of the courtyard adjacent to the school entrance so that the children could take to the “stage” coming straight from the school.

Thus, with this form of space management, parents and relatives were immediately set in a context hosting a typical “rehearsal”, where their role was that of spectators who observe, listen in silence and applaud.

Over the last few years, parents have reacted to this passive role that the school has given to them for the school year-end party by “embracing” filming equipment (cameras, later replaced by video-cameras, mobile phones and I-pads). The refusal by parents to fill the typical role of user of the performance (wanting instead to play an active role as video-makers and hence somehow attempt to avoid the position that the school would like them to have) should have perhaps led schools in recent years to reflect on their organizational methods. Still, this did not happen and, despite the rapid changes that have occurred in society, the schools continue to propose the same party structure and merely “suffer” or “prohibit” behaviors that they are forced, whether they like it or not, to see (in some schools it is expressly prohibited to take pictures or shoot videos).

At the beginning of the (very crowded) party, the coordinator welcomed the parents and explained that what the parents would see was a part of a project on Citizenship and the Constitution that the children had been working on from 25th April to 2nd June.

Then, suddenly, the voice of Domenico Modugno², was heard throughout the courtyard, very loud, through the amplifiers:

Penso che un sogno così non ritorni mai più
Mi dipingevo le mani e la faccia di blu

² He was a very popular Italian post war singer and the song is the well-known “Nel Blu dipinto di blu” written in 1958.

Poi d'improvviso venivo dal vento rapito...³

Silence. The "older" (5-year-old) children entered in a line, all dressed in green. They recited in chorus a long rhyme, led by their teachers. It was hardly possible to hear because the children did not have a microphone and did not speak in unison and those present had not been given a written text so they could follow the words. A blurred chorus was perceived.

The words of the rhyme, which I reconstructed later, are the following:

Buongiorno bambine e bambini, giovani cittadini benvenuti tra i miei fogli scritti di regole e diritti. Benvenuti!

A voi mi presento, sono il Documento, il monumento dell'Italia unita, da venti anni di violenze uscita e dalla guerra lacerata e ferita, che ha iniziato con me una nuova vita.

Vi ho visto nascere e ho vegliato accanto ad ogni neonato, la ninna nanna della libertà vi ho cantato e raccontato la lotta e la speranza di nonni e nonne, erano giovani, uomini e donne. Vi ho aperto gli occhi con le mie parole più belle, colorate farfalle, UGUAGLIANZA, DIRITTO, LIBERTÀ, PACE, GIUSTIZIA, DIGNITÀ e ora che siete cresciuti, ora che è spiga il seme, parliamo insieme.

Mi lascerò sfogliare dalle vostre mani fresche di gioco piene di domani. Vi aiuterò a capire quello che voglio dire...

Ma c'è chi non vuol sentire. Per questo ho bisogno di voi, della vostra intelligenza e del coraggio.

Accompagnatemi nel mio viaggio tra le persone, bussiamo ad ogni portone. VOI E IO, LA COSTITUZIONE⁴.

Applause. The children stood still, they did not know what to do. A

3 "I think that a dream like this will never come back again/ I painted my hands and my face blue/Then all of a sudden I was kidnapped by the wind..."

4 Good morning boys and girls, young citizens, you're welcome amongst my written sheets of rules and rights. Welcome!

I introduce myself to You, I am the Document, the monument of united Italy, that has arisen from twenty years of violence, torn and injured by the war, that has started with me a new life.

I have seen you come to life and I have watched over every newborn, I have sung for you the lullaby of liberty and I have told you the fight and hope of grandfathers and grandmothers, they were young men and women. I have opened your eyes with my most beautiful words, colored butterflies, EQUALITY, RULE OF LAW, LIBERTY, PEACE, JUSTICE, DIGNITY and now that you have grown up, now that the seed has grown to become a wheat ear, let's talk.

I will let your future-filled, fresh and playful hands flip through my pages. I will help you understand what I mean ...

Still, some won't listen. For this reason I need you, I need your intelligence and your courage.

Accompany me in my journey amongst people, let us knock on every door. YOU AND ME, THE CONSTITUTION.

voice was heard in the background saying “The boards! The boards!” and the restless teachers gave instructions. Some children stood up and arranged the boards at the back of the courtyard under the giant flag. They were wrong. “No, not this way” the green-clad teacher arranged the boards on the background, where they should sit. The boards were big cardboard clouds anchored to a pedestal and bearing the words “peace”, “justice”, “equality”, “liberty”, “constitution”, “rule of law”, “I am a unique person”.

The children started reciting a new rhyme, this time round they could hardly remember it and so the teacher had to step in several times and end it almost by herself:

Diritto alla vita, diritto al nome, diritto ad esprimere la nostra opinione, diritto a esser liberi e mai sfruttati, diritto al rispetto, mai offesi o umiliati. Diritti che vegliano la storia di ognuno e che preferenze non fanno a nessuno.

Violarli vuol dire tradire davvero il patto che lega il popolo intero.

Un patto che viene dai nonni coraggio che hanno lottato per farcene omaggio. Anche tu hai il compito di far da guardiano perché questo bene non ci sfugga di mano.

Se chiami un diritto risponde un dovere chi ha sete beva ma lavi il bicchiere così chi vien dopo ha il bicchiere pulito. Diritto e dovere ... non so se hai capito⁵!

A tune was played and the children sang and danced to the tune of “I am a unique person”. The lyrics emphasize the uniqueness of every child:

Io sono una persona unica, un re senza corona, che ha voglie e desideri, diritti anche doveri.

Io sono una persona unica, diversa e originale, che ha sogni e ispirazioni, che prende decisioni.

RIT: Io, io, io, io sono io, io sono una persona unica, nessuno al mondo è come me. (2 volte)

Io sono una persona unica, che se ha qualche difetto, simpatica o musona, si merita rispetto.

Io sono una persona unica, nessuno è uguale, e tu sei come me, sei unico... unico anche te.

5 Right to life, right to a name, right to express one's opinion, right to be free and never exploited, right to respect, never offended or humiliated. Rights that watch over the story of each one of us and that do not show preference to somebody.

Failing to respect these rights really means betraying the pact that binds the people.

A pact that comes from the courageous grandfathers who have fought to leave it to us as a gift. You too have the task of acting as a custodian so that this asset will not slip from our hands.

If you call a right, a duty will answer, those who are thirsty have a right to drink but should wash the glass so that those who will come later will find a clean glass. Rights and duties ... I do not know if you have understood!

RIT: Io, io, io, io sono io, io sono una persona unica, nessuno al mondo è come me (2 volte)⁶.

Applause. The green children, helped by the teachers, sat on the benches reserved for them.

The four-year-olds ("mezzani") came on stage, dressed in white and holding hands. They stopped in the wrong place and the teachers had to step in to have them reach the positions assigned to them. When they were ready, they started to recite a rhyme by heart in chorus:

Libero giovane libero vecchio, libera l'acqua che fugge dal secchio.
Libera donna libero uomo, libero bosco libero gnomo.
Libera Carta per Libero Stato. L'ha chiesto un popolo che ha tanto lottato.
Regole scritte per vivere in pace, tenendo a freno chi è troppo audace.
Dice una regola del nostro Stato: "Decida il giudice se uno ha sbagliato" Se male ha fatto lo può punire. Ma deve anche aiutarlo a capire⁷.

At the end they sang and danced a little song on the nursery school rules.

Rit.: Le regole più belle, si imparano all'asilo, e a comportarmi bene io l'ho imparato lì.
Imparo che si deve, dividere le cose, non far male alla gente, giocare correttamente.
Se a qualcuno faccio male, io chiedo sempre scusa, e ciò che non è mio, io non lo porto via.
Se ci vogliamo bene, staremo meglio insieme, le regole più belle, cantale con me.
Finito di giocare, si mette tutto a posto, e prima di mangiare si lavano le mani.
Se si esce per la strada si sta sempre per mano e tutti i pomeriggi facciamo un

6 I am a unique person, a king without a crown, who has wishes and desires, rights and also duties.

I am a unique person, different and original, who has dreams and inspirations, who makes decisions.

JINGLE: I, I, I, I am me, I am a unique person, no one in the world is like me. (twice)

I am a unique person who may also have some flaws and be nice or grumpy but deserves respect.

I am a unique person, I am like no one else, and you are like me, you are unique ... unique, you too

JINGLE: I, I, I, I am me, I am a unique person, no one in the world is like me. (twice)

7 Free are the young, free are the old and free is the water that flees from the bucket. Free are the women, free are the men, free is the wood and free is the gnome.

Free is the Charter for a free State. It has been called for by a people that has fought hard. Written rules to live in peace, holding at bay those who are too audacious.

One rule of our State says: "The judge will decide if one is wrong" if that person has done any wrong the judge can punish him/her. But the judge also has to help that person understand.

riposino.

Se ci vogliamo bene, staremo bene insieme, le regole più belle, cantale con me⁸.

Finally, the "little ones" came on stage, dressed in red and positioned like puppets by the teachers. They were very awkward, almost paralyzed and it took several minutes to arrange them. Some said hello to mum, others wept. Many had trouble. The spectators laughed and had fun making comments and joking about the difficulties and embarrassment of the little ones. It was most especially those who made mistakes, called their mum or openly expressed their discomfort at the situation that were laughed at. They started with difficulty to recite by heart, led by their teachers:

Tutti i cittadini sono uguali davanti alla legge. La legge è uguale per tutti.
La legge non fa differenza. Per Dario, Henriette e Nicola, per Pablo, Jafaar e
Vincenza.

La legge non guarda le tasche. La legge non ha i preferiti
Non chiede opinioni o credenze. Non ci guarda attraverso i vestiti.
Purtroppo uguali non siamo. Chi ingrassa e chi spesso digiuna
Lo Stato deve anche aiutare chi ha avuto meno Fortuna.
Dobbiamo aiutare un po' tutti. Lo Stato siamo noi cittadini
Allora davanti alla legge Saremo uguali e vicini⁹.

A song was sung:

Ogni volta che la mamma fa la spesa volere un regalo è un diritto o un capriccio

Ogni volta che si fanno i mestieri non aiutare è un diritto o un capriccio

Ogni volta che io batto i piedi lo faccio per un mio diritto o un capriccio

8 Jingle.: the most beautiful rules are the ones you learn at the nursery school, and that's where I have learnt to behave.

I learn that you have to share, not to harm people, play in a fair manner.

If I harm someone, I always apologize and I do not take away what does not belong to me.

If we love each other, we will be better together, sing the most beautiful rules with me.

When you are done with playing, tidy everything up, and before eating wash your hands.

If you go out in the street, hold hands at all times and take a nap every afternoon.

If we love each other, we will be better together, sing the most beautiful rules with me.

9 All citizens are equal before the law. The law is equal for all.

The law makes no differences. For Dario, Henriette and Nicola, for Pablo, Jafaar and Vincenza.

The law does not care what's in your pockets. The law has no preference

It does not ask what your opinion or belief is. It does not look at us through our garments.

Unfortunately, we are not all the same. Some put on weight while others often fast

The State must also help the less fortunate.

We have to help everyone. The State is us, the citizens

This way we will be equal before the law and close to each other.

Prendere quello che mi piace e poi lasciarlo lì, è solo un capriccio non certo un diritto

Un diritto non è un capriccio perché un capriccio val quel che va

Un diritto non è un capriccio perché un diritto è libertà

Voglio guardare tutto quello che voglio ma la televisione è un diritto o un capriccio?

restare in piedi fino a quando è tardi, non è un mio diritto piuttosto un capriccio

Piangere per ottenere le cose non è un mio diritto piuttosto un capriccio

Non essere mai contenti di nulla, pretendere troppo è un diritto o un capriccio?

Un diritto non è un capriccio perché un capriccio val quel che mi va

Un diritto non è un capriccio perché un diritto è libertà¹⁰.

Applause. Enter all children, white, red and green. Again, it took a very long time to arrange the children, who were completely dependent upon their teachers. They sang all together:

W l'Italia W W

W l'Italia e chi ci vive

W l'Italia dell'Alitalia

W l'Italia e chi ci sta

L'Italia è una penisola a forma di stivale che scende dalle Alpi e si distende in mezzo al mare.

Adriatico e Tirreno, si trovan gli Appennini

Nel mar ci son isole con dei veri vulcani

La Puglia fa da tacco il Gargano da sperone

E l'abitano tutta milioni di persone

W l'Italia W W

W l'Italia e chi ci vive

W l'Italia dell'Alitalia

W l'Italia e chi ci sta¹¹.

10 Every time mum goes shopping, wanting a gift is a right or a tantrum
 Every time the chores are done, not helping is a right or a tantrum
 Every time I stamp my feet, I do so because it is my right or a tantrum
 Taking what I like and then not eating it all is only a tantrum, assuredly it is not a right
 A right is not a tantrum because a tantrum is worthless
 A right is not a tantrum because a right is freedom
 I want to watch all I want but is the tv a right or a tantrum?
 Staying up until late is not my right, rather it is a tantrum
 Crying to obtain things is not my right, rather it is a tantrum
 Never being content, wanting too much, is it a right or a tantrum?
 A right is not a tantrum because a tantrum is what I want
 A right is not a tantrum because a right is freedom

11 Long live Italy, long live it
 Long live Italy and those who live in Italy

Every child received in his/her hands a small Italian flag that they started to waive, shouting:

VIVA VIVA IL TRICOLORE
SE SVENTOLA IN ARIA È UN SEGNO D'AMORE.
UN SEGNO D'AMORE PER LA NOSTRA TERRA
CHE AMA LA VITA E RIPUDIA LA GUERRA (2v)¹².

One teacher warned the children that a surprise was coming up. The teachers brought large boxes, with the jingle of the song by Domenico Modugno ("Volare... oo--- oooo") being played in the background; inside the boxes there were balloons colored in white, red and green and bearing the word PEACE that were thrown up in the air. The children looked at them, waved the flags and shouted "Peace".

The parents applauded. The children were "delivered" to their parents for a snack all together during which the usual ritual took place (the giving of year-end gifts to the teachers).

Individualism, Patriotism, Citizenship and Pacifism. A Weird Educational Mix

Over the last few years, especially in Anglo-Saxon countries, a debate has been going on as to whether patriotism can be an educational goal in public schools and, as such, whether it can be taught and encouraged there (Archard 1999; Ben-Porath 2006, 2007; Brighouse 2006; Callan 2006; Gutmann 2002; Hand 2011; Merry 2009; Miller 2007; Nussbaum 1996, 2011; White 2001; Wingo 2007).

Long live Italy with Alitalia
Long live Italy and those who stay in Italy
Italy is a boot-shaped peninsula that comes down from the Alps and lays in the middle of the
Adriatic and Tyrrhenian sea, there are the Apennines
In the sea there are islands with real volcanoes
Puglia is the heel, the Gargano is the spur
And millions of persons live across it
Long live Italy, long live it
Long live Italy and those who live in Italy
Long live Italy with Alitalia
Long live Italy and those who stay in Italy
12 LONG LIVE THE TRICOLOUR
IF IT WAVES IN THE AIR IT IS A SIGN OF LOVE.
A SIGN OF LOVE FOR OUR LAND
THAT LOVES LIFE AND REJECTS WAR (twice)

Amongst those who express perplexities, Michael Hand (2011) highlights that patriotism leverages emotional reactions but does not promote critical thinking thereon:

Emotional education may be either rational or non-rational. By rational emotional education I mean the attempt to offer pupils good reasons for moderating or changing their emotional response, to help them see why the reasons are good and to equip them with techniques for bringing about such change as they choose to make on the basis of those reasons. By non rational emotional education I mean the attempt to deploy methods of psychological manipulation to alter pupil emotional responses directly, without reference to their capacities for reason assessment and rational choice. It is attempting to say that only the former counts as education proper, on the grounds that it alone meets an appropriate standards of “willingness and voluntariness on the part of the learner” (Peters 1966, p. 45); but perhaps this unhelpfully excludes the important and legitimate form of non-rational influence – the modelling, cajoling, and exhorting – by which teachers begin to shape the emotional responses of young children before they are ready to assume responsibility for their own emotional life (Hand 2011, p. 331).

Waving flags and declaiming one’s love for the homeland are rituals that nurture emotional responses in children before they even have the possibility to understand and critically evaluate the meaning of belonging and the value of this emotional participation.

Other authors (Ledoux, Marshall 2010) also highlight that while parents have the possibility to choose whether or not their children should attend religion classes and while a debate is ongoing amongst politicians as to the appropriateness of religion classes, for the time being it would appear that no one is against them and, likewise, it would also appear that no one is allowed to object to educating children through the sort of State Religion that is nationalism. If citizenship education is to be implemented via knowledge of the Constitution, it is unclear what the use is of waving flags and singing national anthems, aside from promoting the representation of a reified notion of communal life based upon an emotional participation in feelings of belonging, land and blood (that have become outdated in the light of the current complex historical moment).

In Italy the debate is primarily focused on the relationship between the process of democratization and consolidation of the nationhood on one hand (Bobbio 1995) and the relationship between patriotism and nationalism on the other (Tuccari 2000; Viroli 1995). It has been pointed out that though the notions of Homeland and Nation are often used as synonyms, patriotism indicates love for the homeland, its institutions and its symbols, and hence, as such, should not be viewed as being negative, whereas nationalism, meaning extolling the political and economic greatness of one’s

nation, can be problematic. In view of that, one problem which remains unresolved is how to distinguish between the two aspects and to prevent a shift from the first to the second (Vincent 2009; Audi 2009). Moreover, it is questionable whether nowadays we can propose the love for our country as a value, considering the complex changes underway.

While a number of studies emphasize the need to promote forms of civil and democratic integration and to rethink, in this sense, the very notion of nationhood (Rusconi 1993) and while citizenship education is overtly encouraged in schools (D.lgs. 59/2004; L. 169/2008; L. 107/2015), scarce attention has been given to the methods of such promotion, which have been left to the free interpretation of the teachers.

In the case of the party explored here, I believe that a number of comments can be made. The first relates to the general confusion of concepts, words and themes proposed: “uniqueness of the person”, “homeland” “flag” “nationhood” “peace” “citizenship” are all used as synonyms and as if they were interchangeable.

The notions of citizenship, homeland and flag, as well as - if one carefully reads the lyrics of the songs and rhymes proposed - the uniqueness of the child, the rules of the nursery school, the tantrums, the afternoon nap and Alitalia, are likewise all mixed up together. If every child is unique, why is it that they are all dressed in the same way under a flag and recite by heart? What educational space allows them to express their uniqueness? In what does it practically manifest itself? How is it recognized and encouraged?

Indeed, there appears to be a contradiction between the symbolism of the objects and songs, which aims to create a sense of collective identification, mitigating differences (Cohen 1985), and the singing of the little song “I am a unique person” that appears to contradict the fusion brought about by rituals, reinstating the primacy of individuals over the community and emphasizing the uniqueness of every child.

Furthermore, if the goal of the teachers is to promote a reflection on citizenship, why is it that ready-made rhymes have been used which have been downloaded from the Internet instead of short texts produced by the children themselves? And why has it not been possible for parents to understand the words and reflect (possibly on a short text) together with the children?

What is the relationship between the notions of homeland and peace evoked at the end of the party? Is it not dangerous to associate them in such an acritical manner?

Not surprisingly, one mother has provocatively posted on her Facebook page a photograph of the party showing the children under a flag and the teacher as seen from the back and with her right arm raising and ironically commented on that image alluding to Fascism. This episode, followed by several controversies over the use of social networks by parents, emphasizes instead, in my opinion, the fact that this scene recalls images that in our his-

tory have a strong connotation and which are hardly related to the uniqueness of each of us and with Peace.

It is obvious that the teacher raised her right arm because she was “leading” the children in the musical. However, it is equally important to point out that perhaps it would be appropriate to reflect on the fact that national symbols do not only represent the general notion of “nationhood” but aggregate knowledge, stories, affection (Butz 2009) and that certain images (the children framed under a flag) and certain terms – “nation(hood)”, “homeland”, “flag” – are not neutral but are set within the framework of a disputed historical memory and refer to values which are complex and contradictory and need to be “given a new meaning”. If the process of giving a new meaning in the light of the changed political and social context does not take place and the same words and gestures, the myth of the homeland and of the flag are re-proposed instead, the nursery school party appears to take on the traits of symbolic violence (Bourdieu 1977) and of body discipline (Foucault 1979) which are more similar to the practices of despotic regimes than to the promotion of dialogue and critical thinking that characterize democratic settings.

In the second place, during the party there was a sudden shift from the multiculturalism that has characterized educational policies over the last twenty years (and that is still adopted by many schools) to forms of neo-assimilation that are in no way related to Italian post-war school culture. Starting from the 1990s, indeed, in Italian nursery schools and primary schools a multicultural approach has prevailed (Ambrosini 2008; Colombo 2002; Martinello 2000; Ongini 2011). In the school discussed in this paper, for example, during the Christmas performance that preceded the year-end party, the mothers of “different ethnic groups” were asked whether they were willing to play a closing ring-around-the-rosy. The ring-around-the-rosy evoked the theme of peace resulting from the peaceful presence of different cultures within the educational space. Hence, there is a contradiction between the ordinary style of year-end parties, which are aimed at celebrating differences as the expression of the inter-cultural projects that have characterized school teaching in the previous years (with these projects being aimed at emphasizing diversity in food, garments and traditions) and the sharp neo-assimilationist turn that has suddenly led to school projects focused on the notions of homeland and the flag (Portes 2004).

Apparently, the teachers are not aware of this contradiction. Nor has the theme been tackled and proposed to parents with the critical mind that Martha Nussbaum deems to be essential for patriotism education (2011). It has simply been taken for granted that it was good and “natural” to aggregate all the children holding a flag in their hands under a large Tricolor as if this was seamlessly connected to the educational project of the school. In short, the school appears to have suddenly moved from a multiculturalism

arisen out of excess culture (Aime 2004) to a naive neo-assimilation.

In point of fact, the process of integration within the school is a multi-dimensional and complex process for which it is increasingly clear that it is necessary – as children with different backgrounds are meant to settle in multiple social and cultural contexts – to be cautious when referring to the nationhood-centered versus a non-nationhood-centered rationale and to take into account the context in which a process of integration occurs, so as to avoid reified, static and ahistorical ways of representing differences and communal living. The key point here is the ability to manage the transition from a romantic and homogeneous idea of nationhood to a pluralistic and negotiated concept of national identity (Ambrosini 2008), that makes it possible to think of new generations as “places” where new codes, forms of action and identification come into being to establish new methods of social inclusion and new ideas of citizenship (Esser 2004, 2010; Stacul 2006; Colombo, Domaneschi and Marchetti 2011).

In the third place, in the party under examination here, as in many other parties, an unpleasant contradiction emerged, i.e.: the child, far from being the bearer of agency referred to by childhood sociology (Satta 2012), is instead a passive subject who is taught to recite rhymes by heart. If the child is unique and special, it is not apparent why he/she should move as a puppet driven by the teachers. Neither can we understand why a child aged 3 or 4 or 5 is supposed to recite by heart a text that he/she cannot understand, a text that is even more difficult for migrant children and their families, some of whom are presumably still learning Italian.

For the time being, no one is critically proposing to review this way of managing the unanimously appreciated year-end party. The teachers apparently feel rewarded when showing what they have been able to do by themselves and the parents apparently feel happy that they can take back their child and jealously retain this recollection or share it – at a distance – through the many *social network* available today. One should instead seriously question the meaning, for educational purposes, of the inertial maintaining of this practice, in which the children passively recite by heart (quite a few are scared or paralyzed or cry), led by their teachers who position them like puppets on stage. Has anyone thought of changing these performances and replacing them with different forms of sharing in which the child has an active and autonomous role? Why couldn't the teachers or parents perform dressed as caterpillars, ants or butterflies and let their knowledgeable children shoot the video instead?

There clearly appears to be a huge gap between the beautiful words recited, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the actual educational focus on children (what can children understand and how can they live what they understand?), on the parents (did anyone care that they could feel, understand and think besides shooting their video?) and on the daily educational

practices that continue to leave very little room to autonomy, listening and the promotion of the skills of individuals. From this point of view, this party appears to be an educational practice which perhaps should be reviewed and discussed with the critical contribution of anthropology.

The main tension probably arises out of the ambiguity of the text of law, which talks of national Unity, Constitution, the national anthem and the flag as if they were one and the same thing. Indeed, there is a difference between citizenship education – which provides for a critical discussion of the foundation of the civil society – and the promotion of patriotic sentiments through songs and flags, in a sentimental and acritical manner. As a matter of fact, schools should not be like barracks but rather places where the pupils can be educated to develop a critical mind. And this cannot be done by reciting by heart under a flag, let alone at the age of four or five.

The fact of not being able to unravel this ambiguity, possibly also because teachers lack historical and anthropological training, produces collective moments like these, during which rhetorical words are uttered and contradictory and ambivalent messages are given.

Conclusions

“Nations are not just the product of structural forces; they are simultaneously the practical accomplishment of ordinary people engaging in mundane activities in their everyday lives” (Fox, Miller Idriss 2008, p. 554). In agreement with the idea that it is through mundane activities of everyday life that social order is constructed, reproduced and transmitted, this paper draws inspiration from the analysis of a school year-end party in a primary school to propose two interdependent critical considerations.

The former relates to the danger engendered by the confusion between the notion of citizenship (and the projects of citizenship education required by the law “Rules for Acquiring Knowledge and Skills relating to «Citizenship and the Constitution» and for the teaching the Italian national anthem (the Hymn of Mameli) and the notion of patriotism. Singing and reciting by heart do not promote citizenship but produce a strong sense of belonging and commonality, i.e. they are symbolic practices that contribute to the creation of an imagined community (Anderson 19991). These processes shift the attention to the iconic aspects of communication, in which the immediacy of pictures produces an idea of equality and sharing (Feedberg 1989) and hence has a strong emotional impact. Emotions, however, do have an impact on beliefs and convictions and hence, through the symbolism of singing and of the objects (in this case the flags and three-color balloons flying up in the air and bearing the word “peace”), not only do we give a meaning to the world but, more than that, we are also led to believe that the

order that we see is not produced by us but belongs to the external world and, as such, is to be protected and safeguarded (Kertzer 1988). The analytical challenge of cultural anthropology consists in inverting this process, i.e. in understanding which indexical social manoeuvres hide behind the icons proposed by the official culture (Herzfeld 1997), that is to say, which different needs and expectations are concealed and hidden by the words “Homeland”, “Tricolor” “Peace” and if, and to what extent, an inclusive nation can respect and welcome them (Cohen 1985; Fox, Miller Idris 2008). This is what a good school should do.

I agree with Rutten, Mottart and Soetaert (2010) when they maintain that we should not be immediately suspicious of all forms of pride and identification that individuals can develop vis à vis their national identity. However, it is necessary for schools to contribute towards transmitting an idea of belonging as one of dialogue, in progress, dynamic while at the same time discouraging the development of a reifying sense of national identity. It is necessary for teachers to seriously wonder:

Should “educators adopt a multitude of small narrative or look for a new ideological grand narrative” (Ahonen 2001: 181)? Can we should “teach the nation”? How can we “teach the nation”? (Rutten, Mottart and Soetaert 2010, p.779).

The second consideration concerns the recognition and management of the agency of children who too often in schools are praised for their uniqueness and encouraged, with words, to be autonomous, whereas in practice they are forced to recite by heart and are positioned on the stage by their teachers.

The two considerations – one that exposes a confusion between the notions of patriotism and citizenship and the other that complains for lack of attention on the agency skills of children – appear to converge to the extent that I believe that encouraging children to have a critical mind and reason is a valid instrument to foster the awareness of a democratic participation as part of a process of construction of an inclusive nation. That is to say that democracy and participation are not concepts to be “rehearsed” and declaimed through school performances but rather to be “shown” (discussed and lived) in daily life, including through the creation of innovative daily practices – in this case educational practices.

Migrants, who account for over 50% of the population of this nursery school, may possibly find in singing under the flag a symbol capable of satisfying an imaginary sense of inclusion. However, beyond this emotional fusion, the school needs to consider how this inclusion can be expressed in the present and future day to day life of the children waving the flag. The school should feel affected by this issue. It also needs to consider through

which instruments it is possible to give a new meaning to the children singing under the flag for Italian grandparents and parents who still have a vivid memory of the forced ritual activities in the fascist regime.

Believing, like Herzfeld, that social life is comprised of reification and essentialism processes as well as of challenges to these processes (Herzfeld 1997), I think that the task of anthropology as critical knowledge is that of working to throw light on these dynamics and to make it possible to start rethinking daily practices that are taken for granted (Billing 1995) and that risk to freeze and cover with sterile rhetoric a complex present and a future that is entirely to be constructed (Edwards, Nicoll, Solomon and Usher 2004).

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